
Astronomy Panel Procedures & Instructions

Introduction

The research grants programs in the Division of Astronomical Sciences use panel meetings to review proposals for funding. Ad hoc mail reviews may be solicited for some fraction of proposals, and these reviews will be made available to the panel during the meeting. The results of the panel review, both written reviews and panel ranking, are advisory to the Program Director for the process of making award recommendations in each program.

Pre-Meeting Activities

All members of a panel receive all proposals assigned to their panel less those for which they have a conflict of interest. For each proposal, two panelists are assigned to prepare written reviews and submit them to NSF via FastLane before the panel meeting. A third panelist, with the designation of scribe, will also be selected for each proposal in advance of the meeting, with the responsibility for writing a panel summary evaluation of this proposal during the meeting.

Please note that all members of a panel are considered reviewers of a proposal and should be familiar with all the proposals in their panel and be prepared to contribute to discussions about each proposal. You are encouraged to bring to the panel meeting written notes about each proposal, which may then be incorporated into the summary. You are welcome to prepare advance written reviews of proposals in addition to those assigned to you, and to submit them via FastLane. These written reviews will be included with the reviews sent to the PI after the NSF decision is made on the proposal.

The output of each panel will be: (1) a panel summary for each proposal, indicating the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. These will be transmitted to the PI along with the anonymous written reviews from panelists and any ad hoc mail reviews; (2) a rank-ordered listing of those proposals classed by the panel as worthy of funding.



Evaluation Criteria

NSF evaluation criteria can be found on the FastLane website (see links below).

[NSF Merit Review Principles](#)

[NSF Merit Review Criteria for Proposals](#)

Written Reviews

Each review and panel summary should explicitly describe the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. In addition, you should judge the general realism of the proposed budget, and recommend adjustments if deemed appropriate. Please keep in mind that, in most cases, the two advance reviews by panelists and panel summary are the only comments the PI receives in evaluation of his or her proposal. For the benefit of the PI and NSF, please provide as much detailed comments as possible.

Please note that reviews sent in advance of the panel meeting cannot be modified at the meeting. They will be passed on to the PI as written, in anonymous copies. If your opinion changes as a result of the discussion at the meeting, this revision can be incorporated in the panel summary.

Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts are those situations, real or apparent, that could potentially influence a reviewer's objectivity in evaluating a proposal. The most obvious conflicts are:

- (1) Collaboration on any research project within the past 48 months or definite plans to collaborate in the near future with either the PI or a co-PI on a proposal in this competition.
- (2) Employment at the same institution as the PI (a waiver is made when the PI is at another campus of a multi-campus institution).
- (3) The PI or a co-PI was your thesis advisor, your post-doc, or your graduate student within the past five years. Less obvious conflicts might involve professional competition or professional disagreements.
- (4) A personal relationship with the PI or a Co-PI.

We have tried to identify conflicts of interest based on records of publication and lists of collaborators provided by the proposer. Proposals for which we have identified a conflict should not be available to you and will not be assigned to you for review. If you know of an additional conflict or have any questions or concerns about



potential conflicts, please notify the Program Director immediately so we can make an adjustment. Some apparent conflicts can be waived or excused by NSF.

At the panel meeting, any panelist with a conflict should inform the Program Director and leave the meeting room when the conflicted proposal is being discussed. When proposals come before the panel for the second time for ranking, all panelists may be present but those with conflicts must abstain from making any remarks or voting on the conflicted proposal.

Panel Meeting Procedure

Panel meetings are expected to run two working days, possibly with several panels for the Program meeting concurrently. Proposal review and ranking generally takes place in two stages. In Stage 1, the panel will evaluate the proposals, identify those which are fundable by producing a preliminary ranking, and compose panel summary evaluations. In Stage 2, panel summaries will be finalized and a final rank order will be established for all proposals considered worthy of funding. An NSF Program Officer will be present at all times during the panel meeting and will be prepared to answer questions and provide guidance on NSF policies and procedures.

Stage 1: Panel Review

Prior to the panel meeting, the written reviews for each proposal which were received at NSF in advance of the meeting will be distributed to the panel. Please bring along your copies of the proposals and your notes.

When the panel meets, each proposal will be discussed by the full panel, with the discussion led by the two panelists who provided reviews. The scribe will be responsible for keeping notes during the discussion and drafting the panel summary evaluation to reflect the panel's range of views and consensus of the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. This anonymous summary will be returned to the PI along with the written reviews by panelists and any ad hoc mail reviews. This panel summary should be substantive and contain sufficient detail for the PI to understand the reasoning behind the panel's evaluation.

Upon completion of deliberation of each proposal, the panel bins the proposal into preliminary, approximate rankings, for example, into one of three general categories of merit : highly competitive, competitive, and not



competitive. For proposals the panel classifies within the top two bins, the panelists may include comments on the funding level for the NSF Program Director's consideration if they deem it appropriate.

Stage 2: Panel Results

After all proposals have been discussed and draft panel summaries composed, each panel will reexamine the preliminary ranking of the proposal, to arrive at a final rank-ordering of those proposals considered competitive. Panel summaries should be revised after review by the full panel to produce final versions that accurately reflect the panel discussion and evaluation. It is useful to revisit the panel summaries in the order of proposal ranking to verify that the evaluation is consistent with the ranking. Should divergent views be expressed in any of the individual reviews, the panel summary should acknowledge these and reflect the panel's consensus of opinion.

At the conclusion of the meeting, panelists should feel free to make general comments to the NSF Program Director that might be useful in the program-wide integration of the rank-ordered lists from the individual panels. Panelists are encouraged to pass on to the Program Director their views on the existence and positions of breaks in the distribution of rankings, 'ties' or indistinguishable rankings among proposals, instances where ranking is based on the evaluation of the scientific merit of distinct sub portions of the proposed research, or proposals that fell outside the expertise of the panel.

Panel rankings are advisory to the Program Director only. Details of rankings are not made available to the PIs.

The two written reviews and the written panel summary report for each proposal, and the rank ordered list, will be the output of the panel.

